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THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF

LONDON QUARTERLY MEETING OF FRIENDS,

BY

WILLIAM POLLARD.

Extracted from "The Friends' Quarterly Examiner," of 1st Mo. 1881.

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THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

An Address delivered, by request, to the Members of London Quarterly Meeting.

IN speaking of the Christian Ministry we are obviously using a very comprehensive term, which may rightly include all service rendered to God through His manifold grace, whether it be publicly to the Church or the State, or more privately to the family or the individual. But it has become usual to restrict the phrase to public preaching, and it is in that sense we propose now to consider it. On the question of public religious teaching—a gift distinct from that of preaching, though often confounded with it—it must be understood that we are not at present entering.

The public ministry of the word is almost universally accepted among Christians as a service of vast importance to the true welfare of the church. The Society of Friends agree in this view, although in their church economy the ministry of necessity holds, in one sense, a more subordinate position than is the case with most other religious bodies. With us the preacher is not the one essential to public worship. We know too well the preciousness of true waiting on a living and present Lord—the genuineness of the secret aspirations thereby stirred, and the exceeding value of the widely diffused sense of individual responsibility which is sure to follow—to be willing to become helplessly dependent at such times upon vocal service. We know what it is to enjoy together what Spurgeon calls “a silence instinct with devout thought, and with that speech of the Spirit which needs not

the articulating voice." We believe Christ to be the Head not only of the Universal Church, but of each worshipping congregation, and we therefore decline to make the preacher the ruler and master of the assembly—the one man clothed with almost priestly authority, whose place it is to direct and shape the devotions, and who almost monopolizes the service of preaching and vocal prayer.

None the less do the Friends set a high estimate on a true gift for preaching. We regard it as a Divinely-appointed means by which spiritual truth,—the blessed Fatherhood of a loving and gracious God, the great salvation brought home to mankind through our Lord Jesus Christ, and the nearness, the accessibleness, the Real Presence of the Divine Being to the souls that He has made,—may be pressed upon the attention of all who have ears to hear.

In theory at least it is also widely accepted by the churches that it is needful for preachers of the Gospel to receive a Divine call and a Divine anointing, if their work is to be effectual and heart-reaching. Not only is this view endorsed by the Protestant Free Churches round us, but in both Roman Catholic and Anglican text-books we find the principle clearly laid down;—and every candidate for the office of deacon or priest has to declare his belief that he is "inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him this office and ministration." We may go further, and say that unquestionably in very many cases preachers in all these churches, either on entering or in the course of their service, have shown themselves to be truly called to the work, and have made some, if not full proof of their ministry.

At the same time we are bound not to shut our eyes to the fact, that the prevailing view on this subject would seem-practically to reduce the Divine influence to something like a nullity,—a mere conventional expression to imply zeal or success. Or else it presents it as a beautiful theory, out of reach in these degenerate times. This, it need hardly be said, is no mere Quaker assumption. The painful fact is abundantly

corroborated by those who speak what they know. For instance, we find the well-known William Arthur, a prominent preacher in the Wesleyan body, thus speaking:—

“ Nothing is more common than to find the whole system of Christianity, as an organization for recovering mankind from their sinful condition, spoken of, treated, and trusted in, as if it was neither more nor less than a deposit of Divine doctrine cast upon the earth, *forsaken by the Divine Power*, and left to make such way among men as it might, by the inherent force of truth and the permission of auspicious circumstances. Anything like a consistent counting upon a superior power acting with the truth, and making it triumph over difficulties, is jauntily dealt with, even by ministers, as impracticable and visionary.”

Again, a recent eminent writer on the “ The Early Christian Church,” actually says this on the subject:—

“ In the primitive age of Christianity, preaching, properly so called, was unknown. That was the age of inspiration. Utterance was free, spontaneous, fervent and irrepressible in the assemblies of the Christians. There was the full exercise of the gift of prophecy—the miraculous manifestation of the Divine Spirit. Preaching” (by which he apparently means professional theological teaching) “only commenced when the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit had become rare.”

These are startling words to us, but they probably present a more faithful picture of the prevalent view on this subject among the churches of the present day, than the quotation from the Prayer Book. The age of inspiration is considered gone: the gift of prophecy is spoken of as one of those miraculous endowments that were granted only in primitive days, and for which it is vain presumption for the Church now to aspire. And further, as William Arthur honestly admits, it has almost come to this, that the Lord Himself is considered to have gone—departed into a far country, leaving his followers an inspired Book, from which a theological system has since been ingeniously constructed, which it is the duty of preachers to inculcate upon the people. Instead of Christ Himself preparing the way for His Gospel—teaching His own Gospel, *being* His own Gospel—a set of

aborate doctrines about Christ are constantly proclaimed as the Gospel, and the acceptance of these is taught to be essential to salvation !

If this were true, the Society of Friends would have to surrender its whole case. Such a state of things *would need* a trained and professional ministry, well furnished with human learning, disciplined in theological colleges, fettered with elaborate articles of faith, gifted with almost priestly authority, and claiming as its right an ample pecuniary reward for its professional services.

Now, it may be said that the Society of Friends was raised up utterly to contravene this position. We hold—or at least our forefathers held—that the day of Inspiration is *not* passed ; that the gift of prophecy is still mercifully granted to the church ; that doctrine is a mere instrument needing Divine power to wield it and to apply it, and that it is not mere belief in a doctrine, but faith in a Divine person that brings salvation. Above all, we hold that Christ is still Immanuel—God with us ; and that His purpose in being thus present with His disciples is that He may teach seeking souls Himself. We further hold that to every man thus taught and wrought upon He appointeth a work ; that prominent among those varied services is the work of preaching the Gospel ; that Christ still chooses the true preachers Himself, endowing them with the New Testament gift of prophecy, not for the expounding of learned and bewildering theological systems, but for the purpose of arousing sinners, and for the spiritual edification of the Church.

Holding this view of the true Headship of Christ in its fulness, and believing in the priesthood of all believers under Him the Great High Priest, it naturally follows that the Society of Friends, besides strongly endorsing the fundamental principle, so widely accepted in theory, as to the need of a Divine call, and a Divine anointing for the ministry, goes still further. That, contrary to the practice of most Christian bodies, it recognises no clerical order—that

it has no professional preachers,—that it does not regard high culture in human learning as essential for the work of preaching,—that it believes in a free, unpaid ministry,—and that it opens the door for women—the gentler, and (shall I say) the more devout of the two sexes—to take part under right authority in this important service as freely as for men.

On these distinguishing and most important points it will be well briefly to note the teaching of the New Testament, and the practice of the primitive Church. Before doing so, it may be useful to offer a remark. It is surely one of the proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity, that its text-book—the New Testament—deals with great principles, rather than with precise rules. This wonderful record not only contains no systematic theological creed (“which unless people believe, they shall without doubt perish everlastingly”); but it contains no detailed regulations for church organization or discipline, for the teaching of Divine truth, or for arrangements in public worship. It is not needful for us to consider whether it would have been possible to construct in detail a church system that would have met the requirements of the Universal Church in all ages, since the want is entirely met by that wonderfully inspiring and fundamental truth of the real presence of Christ with His church even to the end of the world. But it is important for Friends, who claim for Quakerism that it is primitive Christianity revived, to remember that we are not called, nor is it right, to be mere imitators of the economy of even the primitive church. In this, as in every consideration of religious truth, we need understandings enlightened by God’s Spirit, in order that we may discriminate between Divine principles and human arrangements; between that which is of local and temporary value, and that which is of permanent obligation. With regard to the primitive Christians we have to remember that their circumstances and requirements were, in many respects, very different from ours. With all their privileges and favors, they had no New Testament, no Christian literature,

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or, O Bride of the ascended Bridegroom ? Why dost thou not say, Come? Why leavest thou us to slumber on uncalled, unwarned, unblest,—whilst thou with thy good tidings art tarrying inactive there? What waitest thou for?’ And every moment the answer would have been; ‘ We are waiting to be endued with power from on high:—we are waiting to be baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire.’ ”

But this power and baptism were not confined to the Apostles of the Lord, nor to any particular class in the church. The whole body of the Corinthian believers (for example) whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, lettered or unlettered, are exhorted to covet earnestly the best gifts, and especially that they might prophesy. So far from the exercise of this gift being confined to one individual in the church, the Apostle teaches that all believers may prophesy, one by one, that thus, by the variety of ministrations, *all* may learn, and *all* may be comforted. Or, as the same Apostle otherwise expresses it, “ the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal ; ” that is, as the words in the original Greek signify, “ to each individual believer it is given to show forth his spiritual gift for the profit of the body.”*

Again, we may note what the great Apostle said of his own call to the ministry, that, “ it was not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.” He speaks of Archippus, as having “ received his ministry in the Lord.” The early believers were exhorted : “ If any man minister, let him do as of the ability which God giveth.” It was not man, nor any training college, but the Lord Jesus Himself, who appointed “ some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors, and teachers.” It was the Holy Ghost that said, “ Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” It was the Great Head of the Church by His Spirit that forbade

* *Vide* Isaac Brown, *Friends' Examiner*, 1869.

Paul to preach the word in Asia. It was He who, when Paul assayed to go into Bithynia, suffered him not.

And as these primitive preachers were freely and divinely endowed, so they preached freely. Christ had expressly bid them do this, "Freely ye have received, freely give." The work in which they were engaged was a labor of love—a joyous service, bringing its own rich reward. The wages were ample, but they were of the same kind as the gift and service,—spiritual and not temporal. It was not for filthy lucre, like the servants of the heathen gods, but of a ready mind, that those old preachers worked for their Lord. They dared not make a traffic of heavenly things. While serving the Lord in the exercise of their gifts, they labored also, as far as possible, like the rest of their brethren, to provide things needful for the body."* So bravely did the great Apostle carry out this principle that he not only earned enough to support himself, but had something to spare for others. And this, as we know, was often done under circumstances almost appalling; when it would have seemed more than reasonable that he should have spared himself some of these arduous outward toils. For He who had said, "Freely ye have received, freely give," said also, "the laborer is worthy of his hire"; the application of this being, in the judgment of the primitive Church, that when any were called into service which interfered with their work of bread-winning (as was often the case with the Apostles when they were moving about from place to place among the heathen, among new converts, preaching and teaching from house to house) they were free to receive voluntary support from those who appreciated their services.

This principle of a free ministry rendered to the church for Christ's sake would appear to have largely held its place among the early believers for at least two centuries. We find in the writings of that period (I am again quoting from

* Vide *Old Banner Essays*, No. 4.

Isaac Brown's paper in the *Old Banner* series), plentiful allusion to the contributions in the churches for the help of the poor, the sick, the aged, the imprisoned, the shipwrecked ; but nowhere do we read of stated payments for the ministry. Tertullian, who probably died about 230 A. D., says, "The elders elected by the church preside in our midst, having gained to themselves this honor, not for money, for no divine thing is to be acquired for money. Every one gives as he can to the church. These free-will offerings of piety are not spent in feastings [as in heathen temples], but are devoted to feed the poor, orphans and aged slaves, to succor the shipwrecked, and those exiled to the mines or to distant islands." So late as the year 340 A. D. we find the Council of Antioch directing that the bishops who were deputed to receive the contributions of the churches, should appropriate no part to themselves, unless necessity really required it; alleging the Apostle's words, "having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

As regards the public service rendered by women in those early times, in the dissemination of the Gospel, Canon Farrar remarks, that it can hardly be exaggerated. It would certainly be difficult to estimate the exceeding blessing that flowed to the primitive church, from the hearty recognition of the truth that in Christ Jesus there is no distinction of race, rank, or sex. The record of women's devotion and self-sacrifice to the cause of that blessed Saviour upon whom so many of them delighted to pour out the whole wealth of their love, is one of the most affecting pages of early Church history. Their place in the story of our Lord's human life is unspeakably beautiful and touching.

" Not she with traitorous lips her Master stung,
Not she denied Him with unfaithful tongue:
She, when Apostles fled, could dangers brave,
Last at His cross, and earliest at His grave."

It would be interesting to know how many of the one hundred and twenty disciples who met in that memorable

“upper room” after the Ascension were of the female sex. Probably a majority;—although Simon Peter, after the manner of his sex, addressed the company as “Men and Brethren”! But however this may be, certain it is that in the very earliest years of its history, women were actively engaged in the varied work of the church. Such had been the prophet Joel’s prediction hundreds of years before, and of its ample fulfilment the pages of the New Testament abundantly, though often very incidentally, testify. Not only does the Apostle Paul give definite instructions as to the manner in which women should deport themselves when exercising ministerial gifts in the assembled church, but numerous passages in the New Testament are confirmatory of the fact. Philip had four daughters who preached; Phoebe was a deaconess in the church at Cenchrea; Paul speaks of two women at Philippi who labored with him in the Gospel; Priscilla was one of Paul’s helpers in Christ Jesus, to whom the churches gave thanks; Tryphena and Tryphosa “labored in the Lord”; the beloved Persis “labored much in the Lord.”

That strangely misconstrued injunction of the Apostle’s that women should keep silence in the churches, had obviously no reference to the exercise of spiritual gifts, which the Apostle had fully recognized in various ways, as we have seen. It probably refers only to a disorderly practice of public questioning or comment, that seems to have shown itself in one or two congregations, and which the Apostle was anxious to discourage, so that all things might be done decently and in order.

It would be a profitable, but not an easy task, to trace how the important principles to which we have referred, and which were plainly held by the primitive church, were one by one lost sight of, or set aside, in the thick mist,—the inevitable penalty of unfaithfulness,—which gradually spread over the professing church. The despotic principle, rampant in the world—pushed its way into the church. The brother-

hood of laborers, each actively and freely devoting his experience and powers in some way to the service of Christ, was practically supplanted by the trained and paid pastor; who, in course of time, blossomed into a priest. Congregations by degrees abandoned both their rights and their responsibilities, and placed themselves under the authority of one man, who should preach to them, pray for them, and, if possible, be religious on their behalf. At length this substitutional system became almost universal. The priestly or clerical class thus generated, were often worldly, ignorant, self-seeking, superstitious — the lineal descendants of the heathen priesthood whose temples they occupied. As was sure to be the case, they sought to enslave men's thoughts and consciences, made and enforced their own creeds, and assumed to be lords over the heritage of God. They, in effect, denied the living Presence of Christ; imprisoned the Bible, and exchanged the spirit and power of religion for pomps and shows, and sacramental mummeries that had all the characteristics of empty idolatrous charms.

But a faithful few kept the torch of Truth burning, and handed it on from age to age throughout that dreary night, until at length it set fire to the dried-up rags and tatters of superstition, and there was a great conflagration and a great clearing away of rubbish. And so the reforming work went on, achieved by faithful and therefore by mighty hands, and attended with wonderful success. But even the great Reformers did not see all the beautiful simplicity and breadth of the truth, as it had been recognized in primitive days. The Morning Star of the Reformation had risen, and then the day had dawned; and, in accordance with the Divine method, the light became gradually clearer and more revealing. In the days of that remarkable man George Fox, who has been called "the last of the Reformers," these truths, to which we have been referring, once again, with others, came to the front.

It would be interesting to dwell in detail on the truth recovered and the principles accepted by the Early Fathers of

Quakerism, in connection with the subject before us. Their enlightened views and resultant action on the ministry and kindred questions, constituted a true revival of the spirit that characterized the church in primitive days. It has, indeed, been hinted in a recent elaborate work ("Barclay's Religious Societies of the Commonwealth"), that the early Quaker preachers did not recognize the direct guidance of the Spirit in their public service, in the sense in which the principle has been since accepted by the Society of Friends; but that they moved about at the bidding, or suggestion, of George Fox! The refutation of this strange and unfounded notion is to be found, not only in the clear record of their work, but also in the manly, independent, Christ-serving character of the preachers referred to.

A few comprehensive words, uttered by George Fox in the early days of his mighty work, will briefly give us his view of the nature and standing of the Christian ministry, to which he felt himself called :—

"By the power and Spirit of God, and the light of Christ, I was to bring people off from all their own ways to Christ, the new and Living Way; and from the churches, which had been gathered in the wisdom of men, to the church of God, of which Christ is the Head; and off from the world's teachers, made by men, to learn of Christ, of whom the Father said, 'This is My beloved Son, *hear Him*' ; and off from the world's worships, to know the Spirit of Truth in the heart, and to be led thereby; and I was to bring people off from Jewish ceremonies, and from men's inventions, and worldly doctrines, and from their rudiments and creeds, with their schools and colleges for making ministers of Christ, who are indeed ministers of their own making but not of Christ's; and from all their images and crosses, and sprinkling of infants, and all their vain traditions, which they had gotten up since the Apostles' days, which the Lord's power was against; and against all who preached, and not freely, as being such as had not received freely."

These views, in their completeness, we still profess to hold, and some of them we hold almost alone among the churches. We still give prominence, though it may be we should give

more prominence, to the necessity of a Divine call, and a Divine anointing *for each ministerial service*. We have still no clerical order, no paid ministry (in England at least), no pre-arranged service, no one-man system. Our sisters have still among us an open door, to be found to the same extent nowhere else, for any service to which the Master evidently calls them.

But how is it with the churches around us? We speak not of the men, but of the systems. We may learn much from the devoted preachers who are laboring faithfully and diligently with an undoubted call from the Master, and the true anointing of His Spirit, in the other Christian communities which go to make up the professing Christian Church; and yet we may have to testify against the system which prevails, and seek to uphold and declare a more excellent way. Well, we know that almost everywhere the one-man system—the professional system—is adopted, and is elaborately carried out. I will leave it to those who are in the midst of it—who take part in it, and lend their sanction to it—to describe this system as it now prevails. No man is more qualified to speak on this subject than the honored and deeply respected Edward Miall. After commenting in striking terms of condemnation on what he calls “the almost universal practice of spiritual teaching in each church to a single individual,” he goes on to say:—

“In each place of worship there stands the pulpit—a visible symbol of the monopoly of teaching—a fixed memento to the church that it is to one individual they have to look for all those declarations, illustrations, and enforcements of the word of God, by which their minds are to be informed, their consciences stirred and comforted, or their hearts impressed and improved. From that spot, sacred to ministerial occupation, the devotions of the people are to be led by the same man, every time the church assembles, year after year. The most seraphic piety, joined to the most splendid talents, can hardly on this plan prevent both devotion and instruction becoming invested with an air of formality, deeply injurious to freshness of religious feeling. Oh! those pulpits, and all the influences they infer! Would that no

such professional conveniences had been invented! Would that some change of feeling would sweep them clean away! How much they, and the notion of which they are the visible expression, have done to repress spiritual life and energy in our churches, it is impossible to calculate. The evils always attendant on monopoly have not been wanting here, and the pains taken—but unwisely taken—to secure by means of it the best results have produced the worst.”

Again he says:—

“Does the New Testament give countenance to the idea that every spiritual teacher should refrain from seeking an honest livelihood by the work of his own hands? Just the reverse. The case of the greatest of the Apostles need hardly be cited, for no thinking mind can miss it. ‘The preachers among the poor Waldenses,’ says Milton,—‘the ancient stock of our Reformation—bred up themselves in trades, and especially in physic and surgery, as well as in the study of Scripture (which is the only true theology) that they might be no burden to the Church—and, by the example of Christ, might cure both soul and body. But our ministers,’ he continues, ‘think scorn to use a trade, and count it the reproach of the age that tradesmen preach the Gospel. It were to be wished they were all tradesmen—they would then, not so many of them make a trade of their preaching.’”

Another well known writer, who also speaks from knowledge, thus writes:—

“Are not our churches too dependent upon a professional and paid ministry? Certain men are set apart for the work, and are regarded as a distinct order. One such man becomes the pastor of a church. The duties that devolve upon him are of the most arduous and varied kind, and such as call for the possession of the most varied gifts and graces. He has at fixed and frequent times to instruct the church in doctrine, to direct in practice, to guide in controversy, to comfort in sorrow; to counsel, to exhort, to rebuke, to oversee; to visit the sick, ‘to administer the ordinances,’ and to lead the devotions of the church, making known their wants, expressing their desires, and pouring out their souls before God! In addition to this, another work of a most difficult and responsible character, and demanding the exercise of other talents and graces, devolves upon him. He has to preach the Gospel to the world—to exhibit simply and efficiently, earnestly and affectionately, the way of salvation to perishing sinners. He has to

deal with the cavils of infidels, the indifference of the worldly, and the pride of the pharisaical. All this has to be done in a popular style, that is, a style that will secure the attendance and attention of his fellow-men; and to be done at regular recurring periods, whatever the state of his own soul. He may, at times, feel no heart for such public exercises—he may inwardly shrink from them—the Spirit of grace may powerfully dispose him to solemn silence and meditation—his soul may be swift to hear words of instruction and comfort from others,—but no matter, he must be in the pulpit, and preach and pray. Is it not his ‘profession,’ and is he not paid to do it?

“Ministers have also to bury the dead and officiate at marriages. What scriptural connection is there between the ministry of the Gospel and such services as these? Are there not cases among us in which what is called *Christian* burial seems to be a mockery and a delusion? and are there no instances in which the attempt to *solemnize* a marriage by a religious ceremony, must look very much like a farce? Under certain circumstances a religious service on such occasions may be most proper and profitable; but even then, why should it be conducted by ministers exclusively? Is there not ground for the suspicion that in this, as in some other matters, we are following the Church of Rome, rather than the Word of Christ?”

Well may he go on to ask:—

“Is all this a scriptural arrangement? Did all this varied work devolve upon ministers in the early Church? Did the great Head call and qualify individuals to do it all? Did He not rather give gifts to many, fitting each for particular departments of labor? He bestowed diversities of gifts on His servants because there were differences of ministries. Different services required different qualifications, and these were supplied by Him who ‘gave some, apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’”

I need add little to these impartial utterances beyond pointing out that the tendency of the system of which we are speaking must be put to a premium upon head-work in place of heart-work—upon brilliant parts and mental acquirements in place of spiritual gifts;—upon diligent intellectual effort in place of humble reliance on Divine power and illumination. Dr. Judson, the celebrated missionary, was one among many who have felt and mourned over this evil. He used frequently (says his biographer) to speak of the tendency

of cultivated people to visit the house of God in search of intellectual gratification, rather than for the purpose of worship or the promotion of their spiritual good ; and mentioned it as a most dangerous snare. When once asked in private how he liked a sermon that had been eliciting warm praises from a parlor circle, he answered, " It was very elegant,—every word was chosen with care and taste, and many of the thoughts were exceedingly beautiful. It delighted my ears so much that I quite forgot I had a heart, and I am afraid the other hearers did the same."

But the evil is not often so promptly detected and exposed as in this instance. The man who said he liked to go to worship where he could hear the truth cleverly put, was a fair specimen of a large class, who in their enjoyment of the cleverness served up from week to week for their gratification and delight, go on their road under the vain supposition that they are thus honouring the Truth.

But it is said by some that this one-man system,—this professional preaching,—is absolutely necessary to keep up a widely extended interest in Divine things, and that the Church of God would lapse into ignorance and disorder if it reverted to the method that undoubtedly prevailed in Apostolic days !

Is this so ? Have we here one of the cases to be governed by expediency and circumstance, in which primitive practices do not fit into modern life ; or are there principles involved in this matter of deep importance to the church ? The Society of Friends holds that there are,—and on this as well as some other questions (notably that of the relative duties binding upon professedly Christian nations in their bearing towards each other, and in the settlement of their disputes), it has a right to point out how rarely the New Testament plan has been fairly and heartily tried in modern times. Instances are not wanting of great and striking success from even a partial return to primitive practice in these particulars. It is worthy of note in passing, that at the present time and for years past, the largest congregation in Manchester,

and the largest in Liverpool, gather weekly to hear the preaching of unpaid unprofessional preachers, who earn their living in the ordinary avocations of business life. This is surely not without significance, and other instances might be adduced.

But it may be said, Is there not our own experience as a church during the past two centuries, and has it not been in same important respect a humiliating and disappointing experience? If it be so, it is a condition of things that we are bound to face, and I propose in conclusion, to offer a few general remarks in that direction.

It would be natural in the first place to enlarge upon some of the cheering and satisfactory characteristics of the Christian Ministry, as it has hitherto existed in the Society of Friends. It would not be difficult to occupy an evening on this attractive theme. The heroic deeds of those good soldiers of Jesus Christ who have gone before us, form a noble and inspiring record, which we may rightly recall with thankfulness and joy. At the head of this record we might place the inspired words, "Not by power or might, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." As a fitting conclusion to such a sketch we would inscribe the heartfelt outpouring of God's devoted servants in all ages, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake."

But it would be possible also, on this subject, to write a Book of Lamentations. We might paint a sad and gloomy — and the more sad and gloomy because it would be a true — picture of mighty opportunities neglected; of a grand reforming movement prematurely restrained; of a splendid experiment in Christian willinghood in measure marred upon the wheel; of achievements abandoned; of duties and privileges overlooked; of marks of feebleness and shortcomings innumerable. I must not stop to inquire whether the churches whose policy is built upon professional preaching, and the "one-man system," have no Book of Lamentations of their

own, at least as large and as deplorable as ours ; or, whether the Society of Friends, with all its absence of arrangement and its faith in free unprofessional service, has ever been open to the charge of being an ignorant or disorderly church. I must be content with attempting something much less ambitious, by simply hinting at certain aspects of the question that demand the earnest consideration of all our members, and which may in part account for any failure in the true "apostolic succession," which we may have to deplore.

I apprehend that it is a widespread, and probably not a novel impression that the strength and vigor of the Society is not given, as we might expect it would be in such a free church, to the work of the Christian ministry. Probably no community contains in its ranks so large a proportion of shrewd, practical, earnest men. But how small a portion of these are to be found as preachers of the Gospel in our meetings ! I sometimes think that the old parable must in our days be reversed, and that it is the men and women of one talent who are faithful, while those endowed with five talents too often bury them in the earth.

How is this to be explained ? Is our standard too high ? Are the responsibilities of the service too vast ? Are the publicity, the humiliation, the exposure to criticism too formidable for sensitive and cultured people to be willing to stand forth, and at Christ's bidding, and for His sake, testify in the congregation of that which they know and have seen ?

Whatever be the cause, the defection of so many gifted sons and daughters is surely a terrible misfortune to the church. She has scope for men of large talents—of great intellectual power and attainments—of great force of character and knowledge of mankind, as well as for those less gifted ; and her prosperity largely depends upon all seeking to excel to the edifying of the church.

It is, perhaps, only natural that impulsive, undisciplined natures—those whose feelings are warm and easily stirred, but whose judgments and perceptions are not so vigorous and clear, should readily come forward in our meetings to give

expression to that which stirs them. If we think this class is too largely represented among our preachers, is not the explanation to be found in the reluctance of more gifted members to take their right share?

But some are ready to contend that this apportionment of service is, after all, the normal state of things. They assert it to be true now, as it was in primitive days, that "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called;" that God still chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and that by "the foolishness of preaching He still saves them that believe!"

Probably there are few passages of Scripture more misapprehended than the two just quoted. We may be sure that it is the will of Him who is the giver of every good gift that all these gifts should be truly consecrated, and that His gifted ones should freely offer themselves; and if but a small proportion of such are called to the ministry, the sad and only explanation must be that they are not willing to be called.

It has been, I think, a misfortune for the church that not a few persons have assumed (and acted upon the assumption) that *foolishness of preaching* means *foolish preaching*; or that it means the preaching of foolish and weak persons. The true meaning of the phrase is surely this, that the unlikeliness of the method chosen (that of preaching by unprofessional men who believe themselves called of God), and the unpalatableness of the truth preached, will be stigmatized as foolish by the carnal mind.

This text has no right to be used to excuse the utterance, in our meetings for worship, of incoherent or pointless words, or rambling sentences, or mere strings of unconnected texts, or the constant repetition of conventional theological phrases stripped of all freshness and power. I suppose we are not alone among the churches in having a good many foolish preachers—people who have really nothing to say, and who succeed in saying it week by week, sometimes with many words. Spurgeon tell us that one of the imperative commandments for preachers is, "Thou shalt not be verbose."

He might have added a second to his list, somewhat thus, "Thou shalt be intelligible. Thou shalt have some point and pith in thy preaching; otherwise it is plain God has not called thee to do this work."

I would repeat, that true preaching is never foolish preaching, and that foolish persons are not likely to be called to preach. People may be unlettered, unsophisticated, simple, without being foolish, and the distinction has to be borne in mind. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." We must understand before we can declare; and if we are to win souls, we must be—not foolish, but wise.

On this point I am anxious not to be misunderstood. I am not pleading for a mere intellectual ministry, but for an anointed ministry, having among its evidences of anointing, clearness, intelligibleness and good sense. Among the hundreds of wise preachers with which our church has been blessed in the past, we have had many simple-hearted unlettered men and women, who have been made wise by Christ's teaching, and largely gifted by Divine power to declare His truth. God grant we may continue to have a large succession of such, amongst other and variously gifted servants of the church endowed by His manifold grace for the edifying of the body.

It may be well here to say a few words on the important questions of the Divine call,—the true qualification and the right preparation for the work of the Gospel ministry. We all recognize that a great change has come over us during the last thirty years, and that in the present condition of things there is much cause for thankfulness, and much for thoughtfulness. The habitually silent meeting is largely becoming a thing of the past. In most meetings of any size there is no lack of words; but earnest people, from the very sense of want and need, are longing for the evidence of more unction and spiritual power. We have in most places plenty of speakers. We want to have more real preachers,—men who preach (to use an expression attributed to the historian Hume)

“as if Christ was standing by their side.” - We want men who are qualified by Divine power to reach the witness for God in the hearts of the hearers, and cause even heathens to testify that God is a reality, and that He is with us of a truth.

A recent writer in one of our periodicals holds that the decline in the character and power of Quaker ministry is traceable “to the practice of speaking at mission meetings with no higher authority than a feeling of Christian interest for the welfare of those assembled.” “It is,” he thinks, “one of the tendencies of Bible classes, mission meetings, and other agencies of that kind, to train up a set of preachers who stand on no higher platform than most of the ministers of other denominations who prepare themselves to speak at stated times. The dependence of these is largely placed on their familiarity with the language of Scripture, and on that facility of expressing their thoughts which results from frequent practice.”

The writer of this sentence would probably himself admit that the important labors of the teacher, whether in the Bible-class, or the mission room, if rightly entered upon, may be often, in the Divine Hand, a means of training for the higher and more spiritual work of the ministry. None the less, if the work is leading to confusion in the estimate of two very diverse gifts, it deserves the serious consideration of the church.

. Is it a fact that there is growing up amongst us a somewhat lax view as to the nature of the Divine call and gift for this important work? Are there some who are practically saying that the opening for a preacher, in a meeting which would be otherwise silent, is itself a full and sufficient warrant for any one to engage in preaching? In general terms, is the possession of a sincere desire to be useful, joined to good Scripture knowledge, and a fluent tongue, to be accepted as the Divine call to this special service? If this be a growing view we are surely in danger of losing hold of a great principle. The inestimable privilege of “the liberty of prophesying,” which is one great guarantee against the intrusion of

a human priesthood, demands as its needful balance the full recognition of the direct guidance of the Spirit, or it will be likely to degenerate into something like the "anarchy of the Ranters."

It is as true of the Christian ministry as of the priesthood of Aaron, that no man taketh this honor to himself—but he that is called of God. No man has a right to come forward as an ambassador for God, unless God has appointed him. And if the ministry is to be "the word in season," "the nail fastened in a sure place," it must need the guidance and qualification for each particular service from Him, who, as the Great Searcher of hearts, alone knows what would be the word in season.

But we have to be on our guard against another danger. It is quite possible to form an exaggerated estimate of what we should regard as a call to this blessed work. It has been well pointed out that it is unreasonable to expect the same startling summons to the duty of uttering a few words in prayer or exhortation, in a company of worshippers, as the prophet might well look for who had to warn the inhabitants of some city of its impending destruction. We must accept the gentle intimation, the simple bidding of the Master, only let us be satisfied that it is Christ that calls: satisfied in our own minds, and (if the sense of duty continues), satisfied by the concurrent judgment of experienced Christian brethren.

And when Christ does call, we may be sure He will qualify. He will show us our special work, and give us the power to do it. But let us remember that in this matter God treats us as intelligent creatures. The Divine anointing is not given to save us trouble. God will do nothing for us that He has given us power to do ourselves. Hence the preacher, living in the spirit of prayer and trust, and believing with all his heart in the Holy Ghost, will feel himself bound to deliver his message and to proclaim God's truth to the very best of his power. He will strive to be clear, intelligible, connected, fresh in thought and illustration, no hackneyed imitator of others, no retailer of catch-phrases, or server-up of the dry

bones of theology, but a preacher of God's living truth, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.

As to the true preparation for this work, how much might be said, but how wisely it ought to be said. I must only venture upon a few suggestive, and, I may truly say, diffident words. It will not be needful to enlarge upon the supreme necessity that the preacher's life should illustrate his ministry; that his walk before men should be humble, upright, merciful, devout. This is true of all Christian people, whether engaged in public preaching or not, since every one has some appointed ministry to engage in for the love of Christ, and as a good steward of the manifold grace of God.

But speaking of this special service, (and it is again, in measure, true of other work), may we not say that preparation for the ministry should be always going on; that preachers should believe in no leisure from their calling, but should be ever on the watch-tower looking for truth? Some one has said that the leaf of a man's ministry will soon wither unless he meditate in the law of the Lord, day and night. Whoso is wise and will *observe* these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. This constant observing of God's doings and dealings, as recorded in the Bible, in history, in our own lives, lies at the very root of an effective ministry. And for this work of observing and discriminating, there is the clear abiding Light of the Spirit.

But all this is quite a different thing from preparing set sermons. It is rather a course of spiritual education and ingathering so as to be ready for any service to which the Lord may call. The minister, and not the minister only, but every living member of the church, has to be, like the wise scribe, instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven; who is ever seeking to accumulate light and knowledge and thoughts and truths, so that he may be enabled at the right time to bring out of his treasury things new and old. And so it happens that a sermon may be said to grow and gather itself up in the mind of the preacher without any design, and with none of the characteristics of a preconceived address. He seeks and

forages for the truth because he loves it : because he delights in the law of the Lord ;—and then at the Lord's bidding, and by His qualifying power, he is enabled to apply some of these revelations and meditations, these things new and old, to the edifying of the assembled congregation. May we not say that we all, preachers or not, need more of this true preparation for service ? But, above all, what need of persevering prayer, of true waiting on the Lord, of knowing self put under foot by Divine power, and of Christ reigning. Spurgeon says on this : “ Time spent in quiet prostration of soul before the Lord is most invigorating. Quietude, which some men cannot abide, because it reveals their inward poverty, is as a palace of cedar to the wise ; for along its hallowed courts the King in His beauty deigns to walk ! ” It is our privilege to be trained to enjoy this quietude of spirit, and its results ought surely to be manifest in our ministry, not in mere intellectuality and cleverness, but in true unction.

As regards the mission of the Quaker preacher, it has not really changed since the days when George Fox so aptly defined it. It is a mistake to speak of Quakerism as identical with what is known as Evangelical orthodoxy, plus a few specialties about the Ordinances, War. and Oaths. That which is worthy of the name differs essentially from the ordinary Evangelical creed, both in the inception and the presentation of even fundamental truth. To adopt the striking words of Canon Farrar, the Quaker preacher is not called “ to elaborate unreasonable systems, which give the pompous name of theology to vain speculations. Nor is he called to the ruinous identification of that saving faith which is a union with Christ and a participation of His life, with the theoretic acceptance of certain formulæ.” The Friends have no human creed to uphold in defiance of fresh light. We profess simply to desire the establishment of truth, in humble reliance upon Him who is our Lord and Master, and who we may believe has still further light to reveal to those who delight in His teaching.

Our mission then as a church is, not to bring congrega-

tions to a preacher, under whom they may remain in a state of pupillage and of almost helpless dependence ; but "to bring them to Christ, and to leave them there," to be restored by His love, to be taught by Him, to be trained and disciplined by Him, and to be made beautiful in His sight, and fruitful in goodness and truth.

I venture to think that the man who complained that he had been invited to a Friends' meeting and had heard nothing different from the preaching to which he was accustomed in the Methodist chapel, had some just ground for complaint.

It was never the complaint in the days of primitive Quakerism. The old preachers and writers approached the truth, and taught the truth, in a totally different way from that of the churches round them. They did not say—"Believe this or that dogma or doctrine, and thou shalt be saved ;" but they said—"Take heed to the convictions of the Holy Spirit in thy own heart ;" "Mind the light and thou shalt have more ;" "Obey the voice of the living Christ, and sit at His feet and learn of Him, and thou wilt be in a good way—the way of holiness, and peace, and life." We shall have to get back to this simple but powerful teaching if we are to fulfill our mission in Christ's universal church.

We may, in conclusion, remind one another of the solemn privilege to which we are all called, of being servants of Christ—loving and dutiful children of our merciful Father in Heaven. It is as true as ever that the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few. Let us unitedly and frequently pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send laborers into His harvest. And let us, like His disciples of old, to whom these words were first addressed, be willing ourselves to be sent.

Of all the expressions of approval which our merciful Lord will give His faithful servants, who would not most covet that his record should be—"The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity" ?

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